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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the Melrose-Mindoro School District, a rural school district in Wisconsin, implemented curriculum reform. Current national reform agendas focus on the organization of student learning experiences, the roles teachers assume in schools, and the organization and management of schools. Equally important in implementing change is having knowledge of educational issues, realizing how change occurs, and possessing the skills necessary to work cooperatively in implementing change. In October 1993, the Melrose-Mindoro School District applied for and received a grant to implement evaluation and revision of the district's language arts and reading curriculum. As part of the process, 18 elementary and secondary school teachers enrolled in a graduate-level curriculum class. Following an overview of historical perspectives of curriculum development and theory, teachers began constructing individual grade-level goals and curriculum objectives, seeking input from board members and other staff concerning established goals, rewriting the curriculum to match established goals and objectives, and developing measures for student and programmatic evaluation. An analysis of this school district's curriculum reform efforts reveals limitations related to time constraints of the graduate class for completing the curriculum reform process and poor support from the school board. However, several factors that contributed to the success of the project include allowing teachers the freedom to be active researchers, developers, implementers, and consumers of the curriculum; encouraging teachers to build a student-centered curriculum that would fit their students' needs; and empowering teachers to build their own visions of what the curriculum should be. When teachers are empowered to have a central role in the process of educational change, then the planned reform is likely to be what the school needs to build success for their students. Contains 27 references. (LP)

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Connie Alvin and Tammy Schmidt-Lyga, Melrose-Mindoro
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Paper Presented at the American Educational Research Association
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School reform has always been a popular topic and has taken many forms depending on the political climate. The current reform agenda, starting with the "first wave" reform in the 1980s, emphasized a focus on academic content and increased standards for teachers and students. The agenda called for increased standards yet did not offer suggestions as to how to accomplish these goals. The "second wave" reform has attempted to offer more specific recommendations as to the meaning of student learning, teaching practices to promote student learning, and school organization and management as a plan for school improvement. Educators are searching for ways to implement the new reform recommendations. As a result, schools are looking for guidance as they work to improve their practice and the success of their students.

This paper will examine one rural district's avenue of curriculum reform. It will consider the process the curriculum reform took, the successes and failures, and offer an analysis of how this experience can help to inform the change process. One point is clear. There can be no specific blueprints for change. As all districts are different, all avenues for change will take somewhat different routes. The paper will attempt, however, to shed some light on the difficult road to change based on this district's successes and difficulties. Hopefully, this process may help to guide other reform agendas.

The Restructuring Agenda: "Second Wave" Reform

The first goal of the paper is to review some of the current reform agendas occurring in schools so that the points can be related to the reform agendas of the district studied. There are several major themes that appear in the literature. These themes that make up the practices of good schools include the organization of student learning experiences, the role teachers assume in schools, and the organization and management of the schools. (Elmore and Associates, 1990; Chrispeels, 1992; Newmann, 1992; Sizer, 1992; Glickman, 1993; Murphy and Hallinger, 1993; Wood, 1993; Berends and King, 1994; Goodlad, 1994)

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The first theme, the organization of student learning experiences, focuses on the type of learning to which students are exposed. Analyses of traditional curriculum practices showed it to be marked by clearly delineated subject areas, an emphasis on easy-to-measure, fact-based information, and lower levels of student thinking. Student work was fragmented with pieces often unrelated. The work was disconnected from students' everyday lives. Students often responded by disengaging from the school learning process and doing only the minimum needed to complete work. (McNeil, 1986; Shanks, 1994) The new research of the restructuring agenda emphasizes relating the curriculum knowledge to students' lives and helping the students to build connections with the information so that they are able to apply and analyze the information for their own use. Curriculum should be integrated to help build relationships between related subject matter for students. Higher levels of comprehension may then be emphasized. High expectations should be put on all students with a focus on individual learners' needs and how to meet those needs. This means that the depth of coverage will be important to consider more so than just the breadth of coverage. Whereas "first wave" reform emphasized setting the extended academic requirements, "second wave" sets high learning goals, realizing the avenue for learning will be somewhat different for each student. To do this the format of how information is presented will need to change. Less emphasis should be spent on lectures to students where students sit passively and the emphasis is on memorization of information. Students should spend time in small group discussions so that they can process the information and apply the information to their own experiences. Knowledge is not separated from action, but is viewed as a prerequisite for action.

This view of learning will by necessity impact the role teachers assume in the classroom. Therefore, the restructuring literature is emphasizing a redefined role for teachers. Teachers are the people most involved in the day-to-day operation of schools. To separate teachers, as well as parents and students, from the reform process is to validate a top-down agenda which many reform agendas have done in the past. This process, though possibly rhetorically sophisticated and well intended, does not involve the only people who have the power to institute true reform successfully. True involvement means that local educators will be involved in every step of the reform process. They must be allowed to and willing to change before the process is started, be involved in the planning of the change process, actively work in the implementation of the program, and help in the ensuing evaluation of the process.

Teachers will need to be active producers of curriculum to fit their students' needs, rather than managers of students' learning. (Apple, 1982) Teachers will need to be actively involved in the curriculum planning,

implementation, and evaluation process in their own classroom and for the district to help to ensure connections in the curriculum. They will need to be given the time to work together to plan. They will also need to be given the time to be more active in the overall decisions of the schools. True empowerment for teachers will involve teachers in more decisions than those involving only their own classrooms. They will need to be part of a collaborative, democratic atmosphere that makes all school decisions. They will need to be active learners, be consumers of knowledge to help to keep up with current research, as well as producers of knowledge based on what their own schools need to do to improve.

The changing role of teachers relates closely to a third theme that emphasizes the organization and operation of schools. This restructuring theme emphasizes that the decision-making structure in schools should no longer be a top-down structure. Instead, the organization should be more democratic. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students should all have a voice in the organization and operation of the schools. This will involve the empowerment of all those who are involved in schools. It is an acknowledgment of the fact that the people who should be in charge of school improvement are those most closely involved in the schools.

This should all be done in a positive environment. Teachers would work with one another to help improve one another's practice. A teacher's job would move from one of isolation to collegiality, sharing expertise for the benefit of other teachers, students, and the curriculum. School reform efforts would not be done piecemeal, but be parts of a whole ongoing process. Curriculum development would coincide with staff development that would coincide with supervision, student assessment and budget planning. (Glickman, 1993: 79)

This "second wave" reform is trying to build on what the research says are the characteristics of a good school. Good schools are self-conscious of their culture. They take care of their own business. They consider external standards and relate the standards to their own work. They are marked by positive relationships within the school and with students' families. (Goodlad, 1994: 212-214) Good schools make change organizational and systemic; it is an ongoing process. There is a sense of hope and momentum in the process that brings out the talents of the professionals working in the school. (Fullan, 1993: 60-61) Schools that are successfully restructuring are marked by the themes of building long-term, comprehensive change. They are willing to take the risks needed in the change process. They give the staff members the skills, power, and time to build change. They build coalitions of support to help implement change and build new conceptions of accountability. (David, 1990: 223-224)

The Process of Change

Restructuring agendas of the 1990s are helping schools to consider possible directions of change. The actual change process must also be seriously considered. Unfortunately, the change process literature is often separate from much of the research on school reform. The avenues for pursuing change and the understanding of the process of change are as crucial to the successful reform agendas as are the restructuring goals themselves. Michael Fullan explains the difficulty of initiating change in schools. Fullan describes the need for both individual and institutional approaches to change which need to occur in unison for real reform to occur. The individual and institutional change process requires the steps of vision-building, consideration of the norms and practices of inquiry, a focus on organizational development and know-how, and a collaborative work culture. (Fullan, 1993: 12) The personal vision is important for getting a view of what can and should be done in order to start the change process. The inquiry process provides the knowledge base, learning, and skill necessary to give the change process the clarity of goals. All of this must be done with a sense of collaboration, a willingness to work together. Individuals willing to change are not enough. Without the involvement and dedication of the individuals, however, the institutional change process will be without the strength needed to implement true reform.

This process does not reflect a smooth-flowing avenue for change. Fullan reports that educators must "get into the habit of experiencing and thinking about educational change processes as an overlapping series of dynamically complex phenomena." (Fullan, 1993: 21) Fullan presents eight points which educators must realize are part of the avenue of change. The points are: you can't mandate what matters, change is a journey in that it is non-linear, problems are our friends since they can help us to learn more, vision and strategic planning come later in that too much preplanning can limit options, the individual and the group must have equal power, some top-down and some bottom-up strategies are necessary, outside connections are important for success, and every person is important in the process. (Fullan, 1993)

The steps to change are crucial in that they point out how difficult the change process is. Knowledge and skills of educational issues, how change occurs, and how to work together are all important parts of the process. Administrators must be willing to give up some of their control and share more of that responsibility with teachers. Teachers must look beyond their own classrooms and the daily work of teaching to examine the overall process of educating a large group of children in the K-12 schools. Educators must be willing to risk the relatively secure confines of their own classroom and curriculum planning to examine how to improve

education by examining the curricular, pedagogical, organizational, and financial operations of a district.

Of particular importance in Fullan's points is that the vision for reform cannot precede all action. Planning is important, yet too much planning can limit options and can blind the group to the possibility of potential change. What is important is the realization that vision stems from action and that shared vision results from time and commitment spent working together on issues. (Fullan, 1993) The action of building change will help to clarify the vision and goals. Though time efficiency suggests the need to proceed in a linear fashion, the truth is that the vision setting must occur over time and educators need to have the freedom to allow the vision to develop. This process can help to strengthen the educators' drive and commitment to the process since they are so intricately involved throughout the process.

Educators can no longer respond with knee-jerk reactions to whatever new reforms come their way. They cannot attempt to implement the reform just as other educators or schools had already done with little attention to the fact that the program may not be a correct fit with their teachers, students, curriculum, or school organization. Since each school is different, each avenue of change will be different, making mandates impossible to implement as blueprints for change. Without a blueprint to follow, real courage will be needed to give up the secure practices and to risk failure in the process.

Fullan's points are important to consider when analyzing the change process. It certainly is not how most of the past reform efforts have approached the process. It certainly is not how most schools have initiated change in the past. It would be helpful if change could be a linear process. It would be so much easier if educators could plan exactly what they wanted to do based on a needs assessment, plan how to initiate that change, and then implement the reform. Real change is never so easy and this surely is one of the factors explaining why past reform efforts have not been as successful as hoped. Though there are many calls for reform, educators are busy enough maintaining the status quo that the time to develop and implement real change is difficult. Educators are also undereducated as to the process of change and how to initiate change, which works to preserve the status quo.

The Process of Change in a Rural District

Reform agendas are focusing on school reform by improving student experiences, changing the role teachers assume, and redefining the organization and management of public schools. Though the agendas may have clear goals, as Fullan informs us, the avenue for change is difficult.

Since many districts get started with the process and have trouble making real change, how districts get the process started and how they are able to build degrees of success are important to consider. They may help to inform other educators of possible avenues for success.

In the spring of 1993, the two reading specialists in the Melrose-Mindoro School District learned of staff development grants available from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The district was in need of developing a systematic curriculum evaluation cycle but did not have the resources available to provide staff members with stipends for participating in effective curriculum evaluation/revision. Therefore, the reading specialists applied for the grant.

The hope was that through this grant, staff members would become educated about and comfortable participating in curricular revision/evaluation in all subject areas. An additional objective was that district administrators and staff would see the value in curriculum evaluation and would continue the curriculum writing cycle after the grant period had ended.

The district received $12,000 in grant money in October, 1993. The funding was a 75/25 split between the DPI and the district.

The grant application that was submitted proposed hiring a professor from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse to teach a three credit graduate level curriculum class in the district. Teachers taking the class would receive three paid graduate credits as well as stipends for attending four meetings during the next school year. The members of the class would begin the curriculum revision/evaluation cycle by composing an integrated reading/language arts curriculum for the district's use.

Initially fifteen class members were selected by the reading specialists. These included two kindergarten teachers, one teacher from each grade level in grades one through five, the sixth grade reading teacher, the sixth grade language arts teacher, the seventh and eighth grade language arts teacher, and the two high school English teachers. The reading specialists, superintendent, high school principal/curriculum coordinator, and the gifted and talented coordinator were also members of the class. The grade level teacher representatives were chosen on the basis of the individual teacher's familiarity with current reading and language arts philosophies and methodologies along with each person's professional development commitment.

Several teachers who were not initially selected for the class expressed an interest in being a part of the class; therefore, in an effort to make the curriculum revision an inclusive process for all staff, the class was opened up to any and all staff members who wished to participate. As a result, three more teachers, a kindergarten, third grade, and a high

school learning disabilities resource teacher joined the class. Several others audited the class.

The class began with an overview of the historical perspectives of curriculum development and a background of curriculum theory. It took a more personalized direction as the teachers collaboratively developed the district's philosophy and the reading/language arts goals. Then each teacher began constructing the individual grade level goals and objectives by reflecting on the existing curriculum, the effective practices being used in classrooms, and current resources used in the district.

Throughout the entire process all staff and board members were informed of the progress made and their input was sought. When the philosophy and goals were completed, copies were distributed to the entire teaching staff and school board members. Teachers working on the curriculum revision met informally with their grade level colleagues as well as at a district-wide inservice in March, 1994, to receive their critical analysis of the revised curriculum thus far. Teachers informed the school board at board meetings and board members were invited to attend a class session as well as the district-wide inservice.

During the summer months, members of the curriculum revision class worked individually on their grade level package focusing on checking for a match between activities, goals, and skills. At the August, 1994, inservice, members of the class discussed their summer work and shared what they had written to that point. They cross-checked their documents over the grade levels looking for sequential development of skills, noting any weaknesses or redundancies.

The revised curriculum was then analyzed by the district reading specialists who looked for the grade level scope and sequence as well as the matches between goals, objectives, and activities. Revisions were made as necessary.

When this step was completed the group continued concentrating on developing measures for student and programmatic evaluation. Emphasis was placed upon utilizing authentic assessment techniques in conjunction with formal devices.

Teachers completed the curriculum revisions by early March and the final copy has been submitted for compilation. Tentatively, grade level meetings are being arranged for late March. At that time the teachers and their colleagues will examine the curriculum as written and discuss how they have implemented elements of the curriculum into their classrooms.

The final curriculum package will be presented to the school board for approval in late April. Upon approval, the curriculum will be formally implemented in the fall of 1995 with future inservices accompanying it. Teachers involved in the process, and some of the other district teachers, are already using the curriculum.

Analysis

The analysis of the curriculum reform instituted by the Melrose-Mindoro district shows that some accomplishments were made. The process started off focusing on the curriculum and how students learn. Teachers were chosen for the curriculum-writing process based on their knowledge of current research on reading and language arts instruction that emphasizes the organization of student learning experiences into student-centered instruction marked by active student participation and an emphasis on higher order thinking skills, as "second wave" reform emphasizes. This process led the teachers to examine the role teachers and students assume in schools and question what the teachers and curriculum could do to augment those roles, as restructuring agendas also recommend. The area of restructuring that teachers were not able to start to examine was the organization and management of their district.

As Fullan describes in his analysis of the change process, change became a journey. The vision developed throughout the planning process. Individual teachers assumed a more active role in the curriculum reform process than they had in the past. The district showed elements of bottom-up reform to balance the traditional top-down decision-making process. The teachers connected with outside reform agendas to help inform them on how to progress. The teachers also allowed as many people as desired to have a voice in the curriculum process in the district.

The degree of success depends on how one interprets the data and on the degree to which change is realistic or to be expected in any given district. The success will be evaluated in this paper via an examination of the curriculum-writing process through ethnographic study; a discussion of the curriculum document; and teachers' voices in reaction to the curriculum-writing process, the curriculum itself, and their role in the process. The limitations to success will be discussed first followed by the accomplishments.

Limitations to Success

1. The factor of time for the difficulty of the process

One common theme of the restructuring agenda is that educators have the freedom to design the agendas to fit their own schools. This can be a positive and negative aspect of reform. It allows for freedom and the ability of educators to set their own agendas, which is very important. Yet it can be very frustrating for districts that may need guidance. The Melrose-Mindoro district is a good example of this. Most of the teachers

were eager for change. They took the initiative to be active in the curriculum process. The class they took allowed them the 'staff development/inservice' time to do the research, set agendas, have time to talk and plan strategy together, and to build the collegiality needed to initiate true reform. The appreciation of this time was a common theme in their response to their curriculum work. One elementary teacher shared, "I would have to say the curriculum writing process helped to build more communication among teachers involved in the process because we actually sat down and had time to work together and share ideas." A high school teacher responded, "The best part of this process was the discussion that allowed people at (working with) different age levels to see what was being done and when."

Teachers rarely had the opportunity to discuss curriculum with teachers at their own grade level. They had even less opportunity to discuss it with other grade levels. One teacher commented on how this experience is different as compared to traditional opportunities open to teachers:

> I feel this process demonstrated how limited our opportunities as staff are to meet and discuss/develop curriculum. It also demonstrated how focused we were on our own level. I feel this process opened the lines of communication between grade levels, especially those immediately involved in this process. I also think it helped to build more communication among specific grade level teachers.

The class gave the teachers time to study, talk, and work. The class did not allow the teachers the time to complete the curriculum process, however. The teachers worked over the summer to do the majority of the work on their curriculums. They continued the work on their own the next school year. This was all done without pay, except for occasional group meetings to discuss the overall process that had been built into the grant.

The curriculum writing process is a difficult process. Teachers used the knowledge and skills from their former curriculum while implementing it into a whole language, student-centered curriculum. It is different from the daily and long-term planning that teachers were used to doing when using a basal-based curriculum. It is a much more demanding, challenging process than most of them had ever done. The teachers commented on the difficulty of the process. One teacher described the experience saying, "I felt a little confused and definitely overwhelmed with the actual writing." Another responded, "I didn't realize how much work went into a curriculum." A third said, "The process was extremely involved and long." A fourth teacher summarized the experience most had

saying, "I really liked having the time and guidance to work together with my colleagues to develop a usable document which reflects what is being currently taught in the classroom. It was a lot of work but a great learning experience. I did, however, get frustrated at different times."

The teachers were not prepared for the work involved in curriculum writing at this level before they got started. Even so, they did try to coordinate their curriculums across grade levels and set the foundational plans to integrate the curriculum across other subject areas. Their students' needs and interests always needed to be the starting points for their curriculum planning with the knowledge and skills to be presented coordinated within those needs and interests.

John Goodlad explains the difficulty of the curriculum writing process well when he describes it:

> Serious curriculum development requires very hard work. Whatever the rhetoric of freeing teacher to determine what to teach, the employment year provides no time for rethinking the school curriculum. Ruml was provocative but not quite accurate in saying that faculty members are incapable of planning coherent curricula. The task simply is very difficult and demanding and offers few tangible rewards. Indeed, extensive involvement is dangerous to one's career. (Goodlad, 1994: 154)

Without the dedication that resulted from active involvement in the curriculum development process, the completion of such a completely redeveloped, student-centered curriculum would have been jeopardized. Indeed, it will be interesting to watch how successful the full implementation process of the curriculum goes for all the teachers not involved in the actual curriculum writing process. Ongoing change and continued planning will need to happen as the curriculum is used year after year. The district is planning on doing this and will involve the teachers in this process. They realized that this inservice would be the key to the future success of the curriculum. As one teacher said:

> I feel the curriculum will be more successful than previous developed documents since it was developed by teachers who were given an opportunity to go through the writing process with guidance and background, and other staff members were given an opportunity to provide their input. I feel the curriculum was written to accommodate different teaching styles and individual differences... I would like to see the curriculum used. I feel a lot of individuals put a lot of work

> into developing this document and we need to have inservice time to continue revising and changing so it remains usable as a curriculum should be. In the past, I feel our curriculum was just placed on the shelf and never revised or used... We need to develop a schedule/cycle for each subject area and follow through with the process to keep the curriculums working pieces rather than shelf fillers. There also needs to be inservice time available to keep building all areas of the curriculum regardless of subject area so teachers can be an intricate part of the process.

The change process is difficult to do when teachers are so involved in their own classroom work. How would this process be completed in an ordinary setting where teachers do not have the time set aside for comprehensive talk and work? Without the grant this project would not have had a chance to succeed. Even though the teachers were proud of the curriculum, during the course of working out the final drafts of the curriculum a year after the teachers took the curriculum course they all commented on the time factor, the exhausting process of curriculum writing, and the fact that they just did not have time for any more work on the curriculum plan they were already putting in. That became a worry for some of them, wondering if they would ever have the time to get all the other teachers excited over and involved with the new curriculum. One teacher had high hopes for the curriculum, "I think it will be used, not just put on a shelf. It seems very student, parent, teacher, and administrator friendly." Other teachers were less optimistic. An intermediate level teacher responded:

> I knew nothing about curriculum writing and I didn't realize there was so much boring history behind it. I'm very glad I've had this experience of curriculum writing, it's made me much more aware of how I teach reading and language arts and how my students learn... I'm hoping it has a future in our entire grade here. I'm definitely going to be using it for as long as I'm teaching at this level. I'll do my best to encourage others to use, or at least begin to use our curriculum... I'm not sure if our new curriculum will influence the instructional patterns of other teachers that I work closely with. They are somewhat set in their ways... So I'm hoping this was written in a way that is easy for them to follow, understand, and at least begin to move towards.

Any elementary or secondary teacher can tell of the labor intensification they endure. This reaction was the most common that teachers made about the difficulty with the writing process. It was difficult for them to find the time to research, negotiate, and write. It will be difficult for them to find the time to inservice the other teachers in the district as much as they will need in order to get them involved using the curriculum.

Labor intensification is starting to appear in the literature as a concern for teachers and their work. It is also raised in the restructuring literature as a concern for the difficulty finding time for fundamental change. It will have to become more important than mere rhetoric in educational writings if other projects such as this curriculum project are to work. Until educators pay more than lip service to the issue and come up with workable solutions to teachers' work lives then other reform projects will have difficulty based on a lack of time, versus the lack of desire to change. Teachers who find it difficult to find the time to use the lavatory during the day, much less have time for prolonged discussions on curriculum development, will not be active in curriculum agendas. Their interest in reform may be very evident, it certainly was in this study, yet so much more must be present. If teachers are to be the real instigators of change, then how will this occur? What must a district do to support this process? This leads to a second area of concern and limitation to the reform process.

2. The role of the district in school reform

In the Melrose-Mindoro district the teachers were the leaders in the curriculum reform process. They initiated the change and they were willing to do the work. Fortunately, the principals and superintendent were supportive of the process the teachers followed, though they did not look to initiate change beyond that. The high school principal and superintendent attended the class and so could be involved in the process. This was important for the teachers for they knew they had the administrative support. This was also important for the administrators to see how diligently and professionally the teachers worked to build the new curriculum. The actual curriculum writing was done only by the teachers.

The restructuring literature discusses that administrators must be actively involved and supportive of the process. Specific roles beyond that are not so clearly developed. What is crucial about the district role is that the overall reform process must be systemic, not generated by teachers alone. The Coalition of Essential Schools, one of the more ambitious reform movements, describes nine principles that should work together to initiate change. These principles include: 1) the schools should focus on helping

students to learn to use their minds well, 2) the goal should be that each student master a number of essential skills and be competent in those areas, 3) the goals should apply to all students, 4) teaching and learning should be personalized, 5) the governing metaphor of the school should be student as worker and teacher as coach, 6) a diploma should be awarded to show a student's demonstration of mastery of knowledge and skills, 7) the school atmosphere should be on of trust and high expectations, 8) the principals and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists, and 9) the administrative and budget targets should support this process. (Sizer, 1992: 207-209)

The principles describe a district committed to the change process and working together to build the change process. Change does not always take that form. It may not always be so systemic. In the Melrose-Mindoro district the teachers were committed to the change process. They were guided by the ideas of the principles listed above; they had written a similar set themselves based on their own philosophies and experiences. Principles one through five were principles they could apply to and institute in their curriculum goals and the accompanying recommended instructional patterns. As much as they could control, the teachers followed these suggestions, but the teachers could not control all aspects of the district. Principles six through nine include areas that teachers alone cannot reinforce. The school board was a traditional school board that was basically unaware of the restructuring agenda and not supportive of why the teachers needed to build curriculum reform. The board questioned the teachers' ability and the need to develop a quality curriculum independent from professionally produced materials. The group also lacked the outside connections which many reform agendas benefit from to build their knowledge of reform agendas. (Murphy and Hallinger, 1993) Though the teachers wanted to build a school atmosphere based on trust and high expectations, as principle seven emphasizes, their school atmosphere was marked by a developing tension as the teachers continued without a contract during the year-and-a-half of curriculum writing. Tensions mounted, influencing the working relationship between teachers, administrators, and the school board. Though the reading/language arts curriculum was completed, the plan to continue to develop and integrate other curriculum areas was not carried through during the time when teachers felt as though their work was not being appreciated by administrators and the board.

How do teachers progress when they do not have the full support to institute all areas of reform and external alliances to help them to accomplish their goals? The idea of full support of all nine principles that is the underlying concept for schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools is laudable, but it is not always feasible. People may question how much

reform can be built without full district support, yet the accompanying question should then be asked of how much reform will be developed without teachers then taking the lead and working to develop the schools they want their students to experience. Teachers working alone may not institute all the goals they want but they are taking a leadership role in changing what they can. Have they found success even though they have not developed a fully systemic change?

Here the analysis which Fullan presents is so important. Change cannot be an easy-to-implement, linear process. There is no blueprint for change. There is no mandate that if all goals cannot be controlled and implemented then true reform is not feasible. The teachers could not mandate reform for their district or full support for their agendas. They could not guarantee active involvement and support at all levels. They implemented the reforms they could with the hope that it will continue on in other areas. How far the reforms will continue is questionable, particularly with the precarious relationship that exists with the school board. Without real commitment at all levels it is doubtful that curriculum reform, the focus on students' learning, the changing role of teachers, and the organization and operation of the schools will be questioned beyond what has already been done. Indeed, continued action at this point seems doubtful, but they have made an important start.

This start can perhaps lead the way to further reform if the correct situation, support, or change agents appear. Carl Glickman (1993) defines five levels of readiness for building democratic school communities that are ready to build school renewal. The change process these teachers instituted led the district away from a level marked by a strong commitment accompanied by a weak knowledge base on reform, with no readiness for nor history of collaboration, and a district controlled structure. The change process led to a district marked again by a strong commitment to change but accompanied by a knowledge base on what needs to be done in their district, a readiness for implementation of reform, some history of collaboration, and the start of a movement toward self-control. (Glickman, 1993: 118) The teachers have started the reform agenda. The district may not now be heading for a complete redesign, as restructuring literature points the way toward. Yet the teachers accepted their role as change agents and did what they could. Understanding the difficulty of the change process helps to focus on the point that the teachers were able to build as much success as they could in their situation.

The analysis of the degree of success the curriculum reform will bring to the district is yet to be determined. One can question how much the district actually changed. One can wait and see the data from the programmatic evaluation tools that are made up of standardized tests,

teacher-made tests, student interest inventories, and selected assignments. One can question how much the district will continue to change in the future. Yet one should also examine the attitudes and involvement level of the teachers and look at the value the process was for the teachers when examining the success of the curriculum reform. This is hard to measure, but the value and success should not be underestimated. These successes will be considered next.

Reasons for Success

1. Teachers' freedom to be active researchers, developers, implementers, and consumers of the curriculum

The teachers were allowed to have complete freedom to plan, develop, implement, and evaluate the curriculum. They researched new information while building on their own knowledge bases and experiences. They considered weaknesses in their traditional curriculum by researching their own classrooms. They knew what did and did not work for their students and why. They analyzed students' attitudes and abilities. They considered students' needs and interests. Then they took that knowledge with them when they approached the curriculum renewal process. This became the greatest strength of the process. The grant allowed the teachers the freedom to create a curriculum and the freedom to spend the time needed to develop the curriculum.

The teachers involved in the process made an attempt to have other teachers' voices heard, as many as wanted to be. Though many teachers who teach reading/language arts K-12 were involved in the class and curriculum planning, not all were. The teachers did not have full support from the faculty. The teachers involved in the project shared their developing ideas and curriculum with all other faculty members to get their feedback and support when possible and to keep all the teachers informed of and understanding the directions for change. They did not suppress any voices. They realized that "(G)roup-suppression or self-suppression of intuition and experiential knowledge is one of the major reasons why bandwagons and ill-conceived innovations flourish (and then inevitably fade, giving change a bad name)." (Fullan, 1993: 35) Therefore, they debated ideas, challenged one another's ideas, came up with their curriculums through the compromise developed from the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and then shared and inserviced other teachers to get their feedback and suggestions.

As the process continued the teachers were not prepared for the complexity of the process of curriculum development on this level. Yet the empowering aspects of developing and writing the curriculum that they

envisioned their students valuing helped them to view this more as a positive process rather than only as a work-intensive project and a source of frustration. Though the process was slow, as they could see curriculum success developing their confidence also developed. One elementary teacher responded to the process saying, "I learned an awful lot about my own teaching of reading and language arts. Getting this curriculum organized and written down has made me feel much more confident in teaching these areas." A second elementary teacher said:

> It made me aware of what goes into the process of developing a curriculum. It also made me aware of how teachers can be empowered to develop a curriculum that is appropriate to their students' needs rather than copying/following a book company's curriculum. It made me more conscious of what I am teaching and helped me organize it in a usable way.

A middle school teacher shared that, "The process gave me more confidence in what I'm teaching and helped to provide documentation that I could share with peers, subs, parents, and administration."

Teachers' views of the curriculum writing process developed over their experience. Curriculum had been viewed as a document which various teachers would make use of, depending on their attitudes toward its value. For many the curriculum document was an object to sit on a shelf. As their work progressed, curriculum was viewed as a process that would continue over time. It would be updated based on what they perceived their students' needs to be. It also was closely related to various instructional strategies that could foster the role of students the teachers felt would best support their curriculum goals. Curriculum started to be less subject specific as the teachers started to build connections between the reading/language arts curriculum they were developing and the math, social studies, and science curriculum that were to be examined in following years. They were able to start to build a more horizontally-integrated curriculum. They also started to build connections between various grade levels, often working together during curriculum planning sessions to consider how to smooth the transitions and connections between the years of schooling for the students.

The teachers adjusted to the fact that change "is not only continuous and seamless but also erratic and differential in impact." (Prestine, 1993: 53) Understanding the complexity of the process also helped the teachers to change their attitudes from that of doing a curriculum project to instituting curriculum reform. Curriculum was no longer viewed as only a dry document that presents the information for students to learn. Curriculum became a guide and a process that permeated teachers'

attitudes about their own teaching and goals they have for their students' learning. The process became an ongoing development of their vision statement for the curriculum and for their own teaching. This leads to a second reason for the success found in the process.

2. Teachers' freedom to build a student-centered curriculum that they felt would fit their students' needs

The teachers who participated in the grant were chosen because of their knowledge of current research in reading and language arts. With that research as background knowledge, with their experience as teachers, with the experience of observing the effects of various curriculums on students as learners, and with the new information on curriculum development presented to the teachers in the class, the teachers had all the background they needed to develop a curriculum that they felt could meet all of their students' needs. They developed a student-centered curriculum that could actively involve students in the learning process. They made sure all the curriculum objectives were included and they carefully considered the scope and sequence of activities. They planned to do this in an environment where students read various genres of children's literature rather than textbooks, and where students studied skills directly applied to what they were reading rather than being taught in isolation. In short, they were able to institute what much of the "second wave" reform literature says as to the organization of student learning experiences and the role teachers and students should assume in schools.

Teachers were given the opportunity and power to be curriculum writers, rather than just implementers of a packaged curriculum. They had the time to debate and discuss ideas along with many of the other reading/language arts teachers in the district. Therefore, they had the freedom to develop the curriculum they felt would truly serve their students' needs. The result was for all the teachers who said they used the curriculum, all reported positive effects on students. Some teachers did see directions where there may be holes in the curriculum. They had anticipated this, however, and were eager for their voices to be heard in the programmatic evaluation devices designed into the curriculum to look for such holes or potential problems.

Teachers reported that the students were more involved in the curriculum, they were more interested in their work, and they were reading more than they had in the past. This was all done in an atmosphere that was conducive to learning and could be structured to meet a wide variety of ability levels. Various responses as to the effect of curriculum on students include:

> The students are more actively involved and are allowed opportunities to make choices and develop at their own developmental level and, yet, still feel successful among their peers... The curriculum is designed to reach all ability levels without short changing or boring either end. The students are more successful because they focus on their own ability/development rather than how they compare to their peers. They are more apt to take risks and tackle things which are more different because of their high confidence level... The children are very excited and eager to learn. It is taught at a comfortable pace allowing for individual differences and levels. Things are constantly being reinforced and new challenges are presented in order to reach all learning styles. The materials are varied to provide variety for learners They have really taken an active role and, therefore, helped me to see how the curriculum can be best used and what areas need to be re-evaluated and strengthened.
>
> Students are reading real books, and students seem much more interested in reading a variety of literature. I believe their interest levels have increased. There's quite a bit of interaction going on between the students. This curriculum adapts to all ability levels.
>
> The students are enthusiastic. At their own levels they are able to be successful especially with writer's workshop. When a student works with their interests and relevant materials, interest levels go up... Many parents are surprised at the amount of actual literature students read and the amount that students write.

When teachers started to use the new curriculum and see the positive effect it had on students, they became more enthusiastic. Particularly elementary teachers commented on how much more excited they and their students were with the new curriculum. That helped to make the continued work on the curriculum more tolerable.

3. The collaborative process building teachers' vision of curriculum and instruction

A final point in the success of the curriculum process was that the teachers planned their own visions of what curriculum should be. It was a process done in collaboration as they were starting out in the class. They

discussed philosophies and what teaching and learning could be, and from those discussions were able to develop a common language and ideas to build on. They had the opportunity to talk with enough other teachers from their district that they could have an understanding of the curriculum, the goals, and the aspirations of other educators in the district.

This was an important process in developing goals to where they could start writing the curriculum. It also helped to build collegiality among the teachers. The process got the group sharing ideas and getting used to learning from one another. With this hurdle jumped, it then became easier to risk sharing new ideas and possible directions to head. As has been mentioned, the process of curriculum reform is a difficult and risky business. The teachers did not know what kind of a project they would end up having. They did not know if they would be successful with their goals. Yet building common ground with other teachers, sharing their fears, and learning from their ideas made it easier to risk as a group and work to develop their goals.

The comfort of the group also helped them to continually rebuild their vision for the curriculum and for teaching and learning as they continued to work, design curriculum, and learn from one another. It became a constantly evolving process. The mission statement guided the process yet also evolved from the process. This helped to reinforce the ownership and involvement they had in the ever-changing process.

> Deep ownership comes through the learning that arises from full engagement in solving problems. In this sense, ownership is stronger in the middle of a successful change process than at the beginning, and stronger still at the end than at the middle or beginning. Ownership is a process as well as a state. (Fullan, 1993: 31)

A constantly evolving set of goals and the increased ownership as the curriculum developed helped to build the interconnectedness of the process and helped the teachers to focus on teaching and learning as processes intricately tied in with the curriculum they were writing. It helped them to link their everyday practices into a reflection on teaching, learning, and curriculum. This was as much a success for the teachers and the curriculum as the actual curriculum document itself, for it helped to show the inter-relatedness of their work and their own development as educators.

The teachers had the ability to develop collegiality and to share with teachers in their own grade levels and across other grade levels in part because they were in a small district. The teachers all knew one another. Though they were in three different buildings and did not see one another

every day, they still had enough of a working relationship that they could build on their rapport to do their curriculum work. This trust in one another fostered the support needed to risk trying new ideas. The rapport facilitated the collaborative process and made the curriculum work much easier.

This cannot be easily transferred to other situations for emulation. It reinforces the benefits of curriculum writing among a small group of people. The process did involve many of the district's teachers who taught in the reading/language arts area, yet the total number writing was only about twenty people. The small group made it easier to share ideas and to agree on goals and directions to head. It made it easier to implement reform agendas and to support one another through the change process. The teachers could agree on their goals for students, roles teachers should assume to facilitate student growth, and the form of the curriculum needed to foster active students. Their curriculum was more cohesive and complete as a result.

Conclusion

The curriculum reform process at Melrose-Mindoro met with varying degrees of success. Limiting the development of the curriculum was the ongoing battle for time and support which districts will continue to have to battle if school restructuring is to be more than a rhetorical call for improvement. To overcome these limitations the teachers took a fairly unsystematized avenue for change, developed their own goals for curriculum reform, and worked to institute that curriculum. The strength of that process was the collegiality that enabled true reflection on curriculum, teaching, and learning which must accompany school reform. When teachers have the freedom to be actively involved in the investigation, planning, and implementation of curriculum; in defining what learning should be for their students; and also in the reorganization of schools to accommodate this new agenda, then the planned reform will be more likely to be what the schools need to build success for their students. The change may be slow in coming when teachers are given the knowledge base, real responsibility, power, financial support, and time to develop curriculum reform. Yet the teachers will, in time, build the curriculum they feel their students need to be successful learners. This should be emphasized in all reform agendas.

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